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Play or Lithla

According to Deanic tradition, all creation is the "play" of the Holy Mother. That is why it is said that She "laughed all the world into being".

On the human level, we may say that anything beyond the most basic subsistence – the simplest and poorest food and shelter needed to keep us alive – is, in the true sense, "play": things we do not have to do, but that we choose to do simply because our group (and none of us really think as individuals to the extent that we imagine) gives value to them (making them the objectives of the "game").

This is not to belittle all human (meaning Axial, not just Tellurian) activity, but quite the reverse. To me, and to our tradition, play is not something trivial. It is, precisely, fulfilling our destiny and enacting the rituals of manifest existence. Axial play, in traditional societies, is rarely random: it conforms to sacred tradition – in other words it reflects and actualizes the Divine play, just as the First Maid's Naming of Things reflected and actualized our Mother's creation of them.

In Motherland Colleges and elsewhere, one division of the College's activity is into Candrelithli and Yerthilithli. The simplest colloquial translation of this would be "Mental disciplines" – (i.e. the academic curriculum, research, poetry, music etc) and "physical disciplines" (i.e. the training of the body, sports, vikheli physical culture etc.). A good College aims to excel in both. The most literal translation of these two terms is "moon-games" (Candrelithli) and "earth-games" (Yerthilithli) – in other words "games" directed to the mental and imaginative lunary sphere of Sai Candre and games directed to the physical sphere of incarnate-on-earth (yerthilan) existence. They are called "games" not to belittle them, but in recognition of the fact that "the things of this world and its aims and its purposes" are all "games", or reflections of the Divine Play. It is fully understood, and sometimes reflected in the language we use, that things like businesses and governments, just like schools, are essentially engaged in lithli: play, or games.

It behoves us always to remember that all worldly things are play (remember the lovely Ithelic lines of the Scripture: "Like

to a play is this life and the acting of mummers/Like to a painted scene all of the things of this world”) and to take time upon occasion to turn from thinking “this must be done because it is serious” to the prior consideration: which games truly are the serious ones? For all things are games.

The lithli of Caeranyi schools, our armies, or businesses are entirely serious. That a “discipline” is called a “lithla” does not make it any less of a discipline. In fact, “lithla” is often used in precisely the sense of “discipline” – games, after all, are absolutely governed by their rules. I don’t think anyone would accuse Motherland institutions and daily life of being undisciplined – in most aspects probably the reverse complaint would apply. We do approach all our lithli with extreme seriousness.

We seriously strive to be the best we can be, for our “people” – those we are closest to and belong to – for those above us in the Golden Chain to whom we owe our loyalty and for whom we have boundless love; for the people below us in the Golden Chain, whom we must serve and protect and to whom we must set an example; to the School, the Companionship (the much more Amity-based and personal equivalent of a Tellurian “company”), the Legion, or whatever is our Primary Unit; to the Family, to the Countess, to the Princess (of the Duchy or Principality), to the Queen, to the Empress (who is the daughter of Sai Rayanna), and ultimately, crowning, but also encompassing, all – to dear and high Dea.

That is what the “game” of life is about. And creating some shadow of that great Lithla for poor exiles on an alien world is the Lithla and the Holy Duty of those of us who are stationed here under the holy Novaryan flag and the sacred Standard of Mother Empire (Ihi Matrilan Raihir).

Conversation about Lithla

Sushuri-chei: I wrote a bit about play. It was interesting because we had this discussion a little, didn’t we?

Cloverder-chei: Yes

Sushuri-chei: I don’t know if what I wrote made it any clearer. I think we were fairly clear before but I may have dotted some t’s. No – I mean crossed some i’s. Oh well, you know.

Cloverder-chei: Hee. I think I get the main idea. It’s just that the word “play” means, to me, by definition, something not serious.

Sushuri-chei: Yes – one can see it that way. And I suppose the ambiguity is always and intentionally there. It is a little signal not to take “the things of this life and its acts and its purposes” TOO seriously. Which is not to say that Herthelani don’t take them VERY seriously – we do. More seriously than West Telluriani in a lot of respects. But we don’t forget. Or we shouldn’t – and we believe we shouldn’t.

Cloverder-chei: Right.

Sushuri-chei: In other words, not playing one’s best is not a

virtue. And forgetting the ultimate nature of the game is also not a virtue.

Clovender-chei: I understand and agree with that last statement completely.

Sushuri-chei: Oh good. So – well, I understand the initial misunderstanding, but it makes sense now?

Clovender-chei: Hmm. I still don't understand why you express it the way you do.

Sushuri-chei: You mean in the piece I wrote today or before, or both?

Clovender-chei: Both.

Sushuri-chei: I think the point is that one could say that the "lithla" doctrine, except insofar as it is a way of expressing things, leaves the West Telluri (at least the relatively traditional one) theory of life unchanged. But I would say that isn't quite the case and that that is part of the basis of our work here. West Telluri tend to believe (and probably East Telluri too, though for different and better reasons) that a thing is "not a game" when and because it is established with a lot of material bulk. A real physical school – a department of education – a company within an economic system etc.

Clovender-chei: Okay, I see. That's not my objection, though.

Sushuri-chei: Now, in the Motherland we would tend to think similarly, but if we thought about it carefully we would have to drop the "because". Except insofar as the "because" means "because it is in the line of thamë which the whole society represents". Which actually is precisely what the West Telluri superstition in this matter is a vestige of. (Using the term super-stition in the etymological sense of something "standing-over" from a forgotten context.) SO – our mission, in part, is to establish just and regular Herthelan lithli for the diaspora in Telluria. And according to the doctrine of lithli, they are absolutely as valid as any other lithli, and more valid than any lithli not founded in the Golden Chain (or some equivalent). In fact it is only "by courtesy" that, say, a West Telluri school can be called a true lithla at all. By courtesy and by a certain vestigial thamë. But what was your objection?

Clovender-chei: That the word "game" makes it sound not serious. And I think it is serious, not because of the amount of matter involved, but because everything we do has meaning, whether good or bad.

Sushuri-chei: Yes, I would agree with that. And calling something "lithli" is not really the same as calling it "game" even though the words are in a sense equivalent. Because "lithli" always has the implication of "Divine play" attached to it. And it certainly has never implied "something not to be taken seriously". Actually very much the reverse. And to say "you are playing games" can mean "you are not being serious". But no one would ever use "lithli" in that context. So maybe the real objection is that, to conform myself to English, I tend to say "game" more often than would really be the proper usage. It should really be "lithli" more of the time (in the context of such a discussion).

Clovender-chei: I don't think I would have the same

objection to saying "everything is lithli" as "everything is a game".

Sushuri-chei: Ah – yes. Well, I think we are in agreement.

Clovender-chei: Hee. As usual, if we can figure out each other's words, we realize that we agree.

Sushuri-chei: Actually – now here is the interesting thing – "lithli" actually holds things to a stricter standard than either saying "game" or not saying either. Because if you call something "lithla" you immediately imply that it has a degree of ritual legitimacy. So it sets up a test that most West Telluri activity do not pass.

Clovender-chei: Right.

Sushuri-chei: And for example, anyone who said "I am going to play lithli on my Gamebaby" would get some very odd looks.

Clovender-chei: Heeee.

Sushuri-chei: That actually raises an interesting point, doesn't it? Can lightgames be part of lithli? And if not, why not – just because they are new? The three-legged race is a part of lithli! So it doesn't exactly have to be dignified.

Clovender-chei: Well, are we defining lithli as "ritually correct games"?

Sushuri-chei: All right – well, I think there are two definitions here – it CAN mean that. But very often I think, especially in modern times, the ritual legitimacy is more underpinned by its being the activity of a legitimately-constituted group. So, the three-legged race: I could see certain metaphysical meaning to that, but I am not sure I would want to claim it as a ritually correct game. I think it is part of lithli because it teaches balance, co-operation etc. and is also part of the group's attempt to better itself in competition. So in principle I don't see that lightgames or other forms of simulation are inherently ruled out of lithli. It is just that going off to do something merely to amuse oneself is not how we use the word. Lithli seems to need some "ganbaru" element to be considered legitimate, I think.

Clovender-chei: Hmm.

Sushuri-chei: Even if its ritual legitimacy is "borrowed" from the proper constitution of the group rather than from its inherent ritual nature as an activity. I am groping a little here – trying to feel out the outer limits of lithli. There are other thoughts too. Are our paper dolls part of our lithli?

Well, our lithli is VERY minimal right now – just a tiny shoot peeping above the soil. But I do think insofar as they help us to know ourselves and each other they are playing a role in our tiny, fragile proto-lithli. They create bonds – tiny ones – but is it not of many tiny strands that bonds are comprised? (at least in their "horizontal" dimension). Sorry – that led me off on musings about "warp" and "weft".



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